

THE POLYNESIAN SPEECH

EASTER ISLAND; THE RAPANUI SPEECH
AND THE PEOPLING OF S. E. POLYNE-
SIA. By William Churchill. The Carnegie
Institute of Washington.

MR. CHURCHILL was for some years United States Consul General in Samoa and Tonga. Being gifted with a rare enthusiasm, as well as with a highly developed philological instinct, he occupied himself with committing to paper the hitherto unwritten languages and dialects of the islands. Yet the work he now produces is far from being a mere series of dictionaries. The author tells something of the history of the islands. It is perhaps a pity that he does not give a trifle more space to consideration of the origin of the giant statues which dot Easter Island and have so puzzled the world's savants. Writing on this subject the author says:

They (the statues) are claimed by the traditions of the islanders as the work of their forefathers down to quite recent generations. Yet, despite the tradition, we cannot see how a people unacquainted with metals could hew these great masses of hard volcanic rock; nor can we see how, without mechanical assistance, of which they had no knowledge, they could lift these weights over the crater rim, transport them for considerable distances, and rear them on end. Truly a fascinating problem over which to ponder.

Mr. Churchill's description of some of the missionary efforts in the islands makes amusing reading. For instance, imagine the feelings of the unfortunate young missionary, thirsting to save souls, who obtained his opportunity upon an island with the musical name of Tongabatu. He first approached the Queen, but that lady instead of listening to the message he had to impart was much more interested in knowing whether her guest was white all over. To satisfy her curiosity she turned him over to her ladies in waiting, who speedily decided the point to their entire satisfaction. Tradition, says Mr. Churchill, does not relate whether he met with better success elsewhere.

Like all enthusiasts, the author is something of a dreamer, something of a sentimentalist, and it is this trait which rescues what would otherwise be a dry-as-dust volume from that danger. Here is an example of the underlying motif of the whole work.

It came to me to study the South Sea as the meet and proper end of my formal education. On my desk, as I write the chapters of these studies of a most interesting language group, lies the fillip to my zeal, the mottled shell of a cowrie. It has been with me in the South Sea, coals to a Newcastle which needs no heat, for it is the commonest shell on the island beaches. But it has been with me all my life; a hundred years ago a great-grandfather brought it back with him, a shell from Owhyhee. That was all the story with which it came to me, just a name which we now spell othergate, a name to recall; and in its chambered recesses at the ear the whisper of booming reefs breaking in marble fleece of foam and of the susurrus of the palm. Just a reminder that Polynesia from my beginning has called me with a voice I have never sought to gainsay.

It only remains to add that the general excellence of the volume is enhanced by a most carefully compiled index.

OLD CHINATOWN

In the days before the earthquake wrecked San Francisco Dr. Arnold Genthe spent a great deal of his time in the Chinese quarter of the city, making photographs illustrative of the people and their life, and now admirable reproductions of over ninety of the photographs are published in a volume entitled "Old Chinatown," with an accompaniment of comment by Will Irwin. The pictures are very interesting, and they also have great historic value inasmuch as the bit of the world they visualize is no longer in existence. (Mitchell Kennerley. \$2.50.)

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